

Message Text

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ACTION ACDA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 SOE-02 AF-10 ARA-10
CIAE-00 DODE-00 EA-10 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8112
INFO AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
USMISSION USBERLIN
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
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USMISSION USNATO
USMISSION GENEVA

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USSALTTWO

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SALT, UR, US, PEPR, PARM
SUBJECT: BREZHNEV ON DETENTE

1. IN HIS SPEECH ON FEBRUARY 20 AT THE CEREMONY AWARDING HIM THE ORDER OF VICTORY (SEPTTEL), BREZHNEV STATED: "IF DETENTE WILL BE CONTINUED, IF OTHER STATES WILL BE PREPARED FOR DISARMAMENT, WE HAVE NO OBJECTION." HE THEN WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE USSR IS EVER MORE ACTIVELY SEARCHING FOR A SOLUTION TO THIS QUESTION, UP TO AND INCLUDING GENERAL AND COMPLETE DISARMAMENT.

2. A NUMBER OF INTERPRETATIONS CAN BE ATTACHED TO BREZHNEV'S WORDS, WHICH HAVE STIRRED PUZZLEMENT AND
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SPECULATION AMONG FOREIGN OBSERVERS HERE. FOR ONE THING, THE NATURE OF THE OCCASION, WITH THE FULL ARRAY OF SOVIET BRASS IN ATTENDANCE, AND BREZHNEV SPEAKING IN HIS MILITARY ROLE AS MARSHAL AND CHAIRMAN OF THE DEFENSE COUNCIL MAY HAVE DICTATED A HARD LINE SUGGESTING THAT DETENTE IS IN TROUBLE. SECONDLY, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT AN AMBIGUOUS STATEMENT ON DETENTE WAS DELIVERED IN ORDER

TO EXERT PRESSURE THE WEST, AND THE US IN THE FIRST INSTANCE, ON SALT, BELGRADE, AND RB/ER. FINALLY, IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT THE SOVIET LEADERS HAVE REACHED THE CONCLUSION THAT DETENTE IS SO THREATENED THAT IT IS TIME TO PREPARE THE SOVIET PUBLIC FOR THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE DANGER. ALTHOUGH THESE EXPLANATIONS ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE, AT THIS POINT THE ONLY THING WHICH IS CLEAR IS THAT THE STATEMENT WAS DELIBERATELY AMBIGUOUS AND WAS PROBABLY INTENDED TO CAUSE CONCERN IN THE WEST.

3. WE STRONGLY DOUBT, HOWEVER, THAT THIS STATEMENT STANDING ALONE, CAN BE TAKEN AS (OR WAS INTENDED TO BE) A HARBINGER OF A NEW SOVIET POLICY TOWARD THE WEST AND THE US. IF BREZHNEV HAD INTENDED TO SIGNAL THAT DETENTE IS IN SERIOUS DANGER AND THAT THE SOVIET LEADERS ARE CONVINCED THAT IT PROBABLY WILL NOT SURVIVE, HE COULD HAVE AND WOULD HAVE DONE SO MORE DIRECTLY AND BY DIFFERENT MEANS. ISSUING A STATEMENT SUBJECT TO A VARIETY OF INTERPRETATIONS IS NOT THE NORMAL WAY FOR A GREAT POWER TO WARN OF THE IMMINENCE OF A MAJOR POLICY REVERSAL. MOREOVER, IF THE SOVIET LEADERS INTEND TO LAUNCH A PRESSURE CAMPAIGN ON THE WEST THREATENING TO ABANDON DETENTE IF THE WEST DOES NOT BECOME MORE RECEPTIVE TO SOVIET POSITIONS IN SALT AND ELSEWHERE, THEY WILL NOT RELY ON ONE AMBIGUOUS PHRASE IN A BREZHNEV SPEECH BUT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WILL ENGAGE IN AN EXTENSIVE PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN TO GET THIS MESSAGE ACROSS. ONE FORUM FOR THIS WOULD CERTAINLY BE THE KREMLIN FEBRUARY 22 CEREMONY MARKING THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SOVIET ARMY.

4. WHILE AWAITING FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS AND POSSIBLE SOVIET ELABORATION ON BREZHNEV'S REMARKS, WE CAN NOTE AT THIS TIME THAT WE HAVE SEEN NO INDICATION UP TO NOW THAT THE SOVIET LEADERS HAVE REPUDIATED BREZHNEV'S STATEMENT IN HIS DECEMBER 24 INTERVIEW IN PRAVDA THAT IT IS THE SOVIET INTENTION TO "DEEPEN DETENTE, TO BROADEN PEACEFUL COOPERATION BETWEEN STATES." MOSCOW HAS INDEED BECOME MORE OPENLY CRITICAL OF US FOREIGN POLICY IN RECENT WEEKS AND HAS TAKEN, IN THE FEBRUARY 11 PRAVDA EDITORIAL ARTICLE, A FIRM, UNCOMPROMISING POSITION ON ELEMENTS OF SALT. NEVERTHELESS, WE SEE NO EVIDENCE YET THAT MOSCOW HAS CHANGED ITS ASSESSMENT OF US POLICY AND OBJECTIVES. NOR DO WE SEE ANY SIGN OF A FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT IN SOVIET POLICY AWAY FROM THE POSITION BREZHNEV TOOK ON DECEMBER 24. MATLOCK

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